Southeastern Michigan Jazz Association Update
December 2025

Recent Recordings by Area Jazz Artists

BY PIOTR MICHALOWSKI

One often hears the aphorism that Detroit is a bebop town. Certainly, the mainstream of jazz creativity in the area has been focused on varieties derived from the legacy of Barry Harris, the Bluebird Inn house band, the teachings of Wendell Harrison, Marcus Belgrave, and many others, but there have always been more experimental movements explored by the city's artists, including some of the musicians just referenced. The sixties and seventies of the last century, filled with social drama all over the planet, including local tragedies such as the Detroit riots, upended much of the status quo, giving rise to new social and political relations and political awareness, and this frequently found expression in artistic innovation. African American musicians asserted their liberation from systemic exploitation by organizing; Chicago gave birth to the Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians (AACM), St. Louis to the Black Artists Group (BAG), and in Detroit pianist Kenny Cox founded Strata Inc. and Wendell Harrison with Phil Ranelin created Tribe, both embracing a broad range of jazz expressions. One of the great combos to come out of that era was Griot Galaxy. Saxophonist Faruk Z Bey had created several groups before he organized this one in 1972, moving from experiments with completely free improvisation to focus on compositions that investigated complex, often overlapping multiple rhythms, exploiting the sonic possibilities of multiple woodwinds, dramatically amplified linguistically by Bey's poetry and visually by elements such as silver face paint, reflecting the strong influence of the AACM and Sun Ra. In its first phases various musicians came and went, and the size of the unit varied, but eventually it stabilized as a quintet with three woodwind players that lasted until 1985, when Bey was seriously injured in a motorcycle accident, leading to years of recovery. The group reconvened occasionally, but for all practical purposes its best days were gone, and its members moved on to other glories.

Unfortunately for us today, the recorded legacy of Griot Galaxy is meagre. A few tracks in compilations aside, the band only released two albums, *Kins*, and *Opus Krampus*. This documentation was doubled when, in 2003, Entropy Stereo put out a wonderful double CD *Live at the D.I.A.* from a 1983 concert (reviewed in the June/July 2003 issue of this Update). Now, the Two Rooms label in Detroit has produced another rediscovered set, *Griot Galaxy: Live at WUOM 1979* (*www.griotgalaxy.bandcamp.com/album/live-on-wuom-1979*), offering almost an hour and a half of music in CD or double LP versions. The session was recorded in very good sound in the studios of Ann Arbor's public radio WUOM-FM in the golden days when it was still a music station for a show presented by Michael Grofsorean (whose familiar voice can be heard introducing the final track) and carefully remastered by Warren DeFever. This was the quartet version that consisted of Faruq Z Bey and Anthony Holland, on this set both on alto, soprano and tenor saxophones as well as bass clarinets, with Jaribu Shahid on double bass, and Tani Tabbal playing drums and percussion. The poetic but informative liner notes by W. Kim Heron provide a very good capsule introduction to the Galaxy.

The six long tracks consist of familiar Griot compositions, three by Bey and one by Tabbal and two by Shahid, all but the leader's "Osiris" available in other versions on other albums by the band; some, including the latter, were also revisited by Bey decades later when he was featured on many recordings by the Northwoods Improvisers.

While Bey may have been the leader, we are listening to four equal voices working telepathically with one another, creating a unified sound space like no other. The two woodwind players each brought three horns; interestingly, on almost all the tracks they each use the same ones, providing a chance to compare their individual approaches. Thus, on the initial "After Death" Bey and Holland are on soprano saxophones. Shahid sets the stage

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Recent Recordings by Area Jazz Artists

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and then on the initial theme they dance around each other and the following solos, Bey followed by Holland, allow us to hear their somewhat different sounds, with the latter slightly sweeter toned, with a bit less of the blues, both complementary as they come together and apart, with the leader playing the main melody against Holland's repeated riff. The next track, "Dragons," is once again initiated by the bass, this time faster. The drums come in and then the two saxes begin plaintively together, switch to a riff and then to other short themes, some in unison, some not, with contrasting dissonant moments. "Osiris," opens quite differently, with Bey unaccompanied on tenor, alternatively down home and sweet, tipping his hat to tradition, and is then joined by Holland on alto as they set up the quirky theme, eventually settling into a swinging one, a tenor solo, collective jamming, and then the alto settles down into a laid back solo that takes its time developing motifs. With further contrast, Shahid's "Androgyny" starts all mystery, bowed bass, other sounds, over which Bey recites his own poem. A slow, wistful melody follows, followed by series of unexpected rhythmic, tempo, and timbral shifts, eventually coming back to the initial mystery.

This recital demonstrates the unique complexity of Griot Galaxy's creativity founded in precise instrumental virtuosity, rhythmic curiosity, seamless listening, knowledge of various musical genres, an experimental ethos that was very much anchored by love of tradition, and a love of surprise. Faruk Z Bey is no longer with us, but the other Griot members, including saxophonist David McMurray who would join them soon after this radio event, are very much with us, creating magnificent works. In a couple of weeks prior to the release of this album I had the opportunity to hear Anthony Holland and Jaribu Shahid in different contexts in Detroit playing exquisitely as their art ever progresses upwards.

We now take a listen to another historical CD that documents a different aspect of the kaleidoscopic richness of Detroit music making. Muse Records was a jazz label created in 1972 that for over two decades documented a wealth of choice musical creation. Now, Time Traveler Recordings has undertaken to reissue some of these albums in a new Muse Master Edition Series on both LP and CD. Among its first presentations is *The Free Slave*, recorded in 1970 under the leadership of the great drummer Roy Brooks, with a first-class lineup of Woody Shaw, trumpet, George Coleman, tenor saxophone, Hugh Lawson, piano, and Cecil McBee, bass. The new remastering by Matt Luthans is outstanding.

Brooks grew up just up the street from the Blue Bird Inn, where the famed house band included one of his first drummer heroes, Elvin Jones. In 1959, on the recommendation of childhood friend Louis Hayes, at age 21 he went to New York to replace him in the Horace Silver Quintet, one of the top touring modern jazz groups of the time, staying with the group for almost five years. Silver's music was a popular version of hard bop, refining the music by incorporating blues, funk, gospel, soul, and Caribbean elements in a highly melodic framework, performed by first rate musicians, anchored by the leader's distinctive pianistic and compositional skills. This was the perfect finishing school for Brooks, whose varied early Motown experiences, from bebop to rhythm and blues, prepared him well for this kind of eclectic soulful music making. After leaving Silver the drummer remained in New York, and from 1966 on teamed up with his old hometown friend Yusef Lateef, playing in his quartet with Hugh Lawson and Cecil McBee, who he called upon to join him for the gig at Baltimore's Famous Ballroom in 1970 that is documented on this recording.

The Free Slave contains four long tracks, three composed by the drummer and one by McBee. While he takes only two solos, Brooks clearly leads the group; his dominating power recalling the drive that Art Blakey used to propel his Jazz Messengers. This was not a studio session, rather it was a raucous live gig and the interaction with enthusiastic listeners very much contributes to the success of these tracks. Between 1966 and 1984 the Left Bank Society presented some of the very best in jazz every Sunday from 5 to 9 PM to an integrated audience, with kids welcome, in a place that was once a dance hall modeled on New York's Roseland, a place where people could bring the whole family, together with their own food and drink or buy great soul food.

Perhaps more than any other recorded document, *The Free Slave* confirms that Brooks was a unique master of polyrhythmic drumming that never lost the propulsion of swing, equal to, but quite different from Elvin Jones or Tony Williams. There are no ballads here, just four middle/uptempo compositions that filled the house with power and momentum. The opening title tune begins with a two-bar bass riff that leads to a simple repeated soulful melody with a boogaloo beat. The riff continues behind the soloists (sax, trumpet and piano) who delve deeply into the blues. You can almost feel the tension as everyone is working to create a mood of implied power. At the end the horns lock together and then calm down. This leads to a more delicate feeling on "Understanding," a tune that must have reminded many in the audience of "Song for My Father," that the drummer had played countless times while with Silver. The soloists move into more adventurous territory here, heating things up considerably as they improvise together at the end something they will take even further on McBee's "Will Pan's Walk," structurally the most complex one of the afternoon. Brooks drives everyone with panache and takes his first solo, as does the composer. The audience can be heard encouraging the band on as they prepare to play the last tune, the leader's "Five for Max," in 5/4 time, but a far cry from "Take Five," one that once again has traces of Silver's style. The leader solos here in a melodic vein, incorporating the breath-a-tone, a technique that allowed him to change the pitch of drums, blowing air by two tubes, something Brooks invented, based on an idea mentioned to him by Yusef Lateef.

This is a document of but one late afternoon half a century ago before a large enthusiastic, relaxed audience from a period when the music was going through fluid creative changes. Brooks had met Coleman, who had toured with Miles Davis and Horace Silver, while recording with Chet Baker; he had often played with Shaw, another Silver alumnus and perhaps the most harmonically advanced player on this session, and, as already noted, he had been working regularly with Lawson and McBee in Lateef's quartet. As a result, it is hardly surprising that the band worked so well together and navigated the sometimes-quirky compositions with ease. Shaw is particularly impressive here, at at an artistic peak, but still working towards the unique style that would be so characteristic of his mature work, by which time he had shaken off the remnants of the Freddie Hubbard influence. It is fascinating to compare his playing here, as well as that of Brooks, with what they were doing sixteen years later when they recorded *Beshma Swing* under the trumpeter's name with pianist Geri Allen and bassist Robert Hurst over two evenings at Baker's Keyboard Lounge in Detroit. It was something to remember—I was there and only wish I could have been at the Famous Ballroom in 1970 as well!

Jazz in Paris

BY SANDY SCHOPBACH

The Maison de la Radio ("Radio House") here in Paris holds concerts and on the night of November 8 it was time to promote the release of *Remembering Ray Brown*. All members of the trio played with Ray at one time or another — sometimes at Ann Arbor's now defunct Bird of Paradise: Benny Green on piano, Gregory Hutchinson on drums and, standing in for Ray, Christian McBride on bass. They all flew in this morning and will fly out tomorrow morning for Copenhagen, then back to NYC. A grueling pace (which may explain the dark glasses on Green and McBride, who was also walking with a cane).

And yet they're all on top of their game. They open with "Ja Da" (Jing Jing Jing) and follow that with a lot of the favorites: "Gumbo Hump," "Bass Face" that Kenny Burrell wrote for Ray, and "FSR" (For Sonny Rollins, written by Ray). Then a change: Benny does a quiet solo intro to "That's All" and you could hear a pin drop…absolutely beautiful. They finish with "Captain Bill" (or "Cap'n Bill" as Greg says it), then stand to take a bow to a crowd roaring on their feet, demanding an encore. They choose "Nancy with the Laughing Face" because Ray loved Sinatra, Christian explains. (They all talked to the public at one point or another, Benny with just a few words in French and explaining that Ray once said that, if he had a son, he'd want it to be Christian.)

The night has been wonderful, well worth the taxi ride clear across town, and we all leave happy, the music spinning in our heads.

Craig Taborn Recognized

Among this year's recipients of the famed McArthur Foundation fellowship awards for "exceptional, creative, and inspiring people," popularly known as "genius awards," SEMJA was thrilled to see the name of pianist, keyboardist, and composer Craig Taborn. Minneapolis born and currently living in Brooklyn, Taborn's professional musical roots lie very much in our area. He came to Ann Arbor to study English literature at the University of Michigan but quickly befriended drummer Gerald Cleaver and this led to playing jazz in Detroit at places such as Bert's or Bakers's Keyboard Lounge. Taborn worked with the top musicians in the city, including Marcus Belgrave and James Carter, but also became familiar with the Motown techno school, building on an early fascination with electronic sounds and blending different musical genres. He joined Carter's first great touring quartet, with Griot Galaxy veterans bassist Jaribu Shahid and drummer Tani Tabbal, who would also appear on *Craig Tayborn Trio* in 1994, his first recording as a leader. Taborn has since developed his art in many directions, but we salute his well-deserved award, recognizing the Michigan phase of his journey.

WEMU 89.1

The Choice for NPR… news, jazz and blues.

Schedule

	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
5							
6						PUBJAZZ	PUBJAZZ
7		MORNING EDITION NPR news, information, and public affairs Local news, traffic and weather with David Fair					REVEAL
8						WEEKEND EDITION Scott Simon	WEEKEND EDITION Rachel Martin
9							
10		89.1 JAZZ MORNING Hosted by Michael Jewett				THIS AMERICAN LIFE	SUNDAY BEST Nik Thompson
11						WAIT, WAIT… DON'T TELL ME!	
12		PUBJAZZ				TRAVEL Rick Steves	
1						FROM MEMPHIS TO MOTOWN Wendy Wright	GROOVEYARD Daniel W. Long
2		89.1 JAZZ AFTERNOON Hosted by Michael Jewett					
3							THE IN CROWD Jessica Webster
4		ALL THINGS CONSIDERED NPR news, information & public affairs				ROOTS MUSIC PROJECT Jeremy Baldwin	
5							BIG CITY BLUES CRUISE Joe Tiboni
6							
7		PUBJAZZ			REVEAL	CUBAN FANTASY Marc Taras	MOUNTAIN STAGE Larry Groce
8					ALL SONGS CONSIDERED		
9					ALT.LATINO		JAZZ NIGHT IN AMERICA
10					MOUNTAIN STAGE Larry Groce		
11							
12							
1							
2							
3							
4							

National Public Radio
Eastern Michigan University

jazz events
December

	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

ATTENTION all venue owners, musicians, and listeners
Please let us know about upcoming jazz events in the area!

- Write us at SEMJA
  3020 Bolgos Circle
  Ann Arbor MI 48105
- Phone us at 734-668-7470
- Submit information online at *www.semja.org/submit*

We will include notices if they reach us by the 15th of the month prior to publication.

Aretha's Jazz Café at Music Hall

jazzcafedetroit.com
350 Madison
DETROIT 313-887-8500

DECEMBER

1	7:00	Kiko: Anita Baker Tribute
15	7:00	Lady Vonne: Phillys Hyman Tribute
26	7:00	Pat Prouty Trio: Charlie Brown Christmas

ONGOING

Sun	7:00	Aretha's Jazz Jam

Baker's Keyboard Lounge

theofficialbakerskeyboardlounge.com
20510 Livernois
DETROIT 313-345-6300

ONGOING

Fri	7:00	Ralphe Armstrong Trio – with Gerard Gibbs, Brandon Williams
Sat	7:00	Ralphe Armstrong Trio – with Gerard Gibbs, Brandon Williams

Blue LLama Jazz Club

www.bluellamaclub.com
314 South Main St.
ANN ARBOR 734-372-3200

DECEMBER

3	7:00	David Janeway Trio
5, 6	6:00	Endea Owens & the Cookout
7	6:00	Stella Cole: Christmas Dreaming
10	7:00	Aguankó
12	5:01	WEMU 5:01 Jazz Series: Ron Brooks Quartet
12	7:00	Robert Hurst & Black Currant Jam
14	6:00	Gustavo Casenave
17	7:00	Kevin Brewster & Black Renaissance
18	7:00	William Hill III Trio
19	7:00	Marcus Elliot
20	6:30	Nick Collins Sextet
20	10:15	Late Night: Karim Gideon Quartet
21	6:00	Maurice MOBETTA Brown
26	7:00	Sean Dobbins Soulful Holiday Show
27	6:30	Ralphe Armstrong Trio
27	10:15	Late Night: Bunkerman
28	6:00	Brandon Rose & Soul Therapy
31	7:00	Paul Keller Quintet
31	9:00	New Year's Eve with Thornetta Davis

Cadieux Café

www.cadieuxcafe.com
4300 Cadieux Rd.
DETROIT 313-882-8560

DECEMBER

28	4:00	Planet D Nonet

ONGOING

Thu	8:00	Bill Meyer Group – with Ibrahim Jones, Butter Hawkins

Cliff Bells

www.cliffbells.com
2030 Park Ave at West Adams
DETROIT 313-961-2543

DECEMBER

3	7:00	the Swing Syndicate Jazz Lab
5, 6	7:30 9:30	Marcus Elliot: Broken Seeds Vol. II
7	5:30 7:30	Marcus Elliot: Broken Seeds Vol. II
10	6:00	U of D — Just Jazz!
11–13	7:30 9:30	Sean Dobbins
14	5:30 7:30	Cliff Bell's Jazz Orchestra: Duke Ellington's Nutcracker Suite
18	7:30 9:30	Olivia Van Goor: Waiting for Santa
19, 20	7:30 9:30	James Carter Organ Trio
21	5:30 7:30	James Carter Organ Trio
22	7:30 9:30	William Hill III: Home for the Holidays
23	7:30 9:30	Joshua Watkins Holiday Celebration
26	7:30 9:30	In the Tradition: Kwanzza – Umoja (Unity)
27	7:30 9:30	Roger Jones & Higher Calling
28	5:30 7:30	Kasan Belgrave
29	7:30 9:30	William Hill III
30	7:30 9:30	Smoke Jones
31	7:30	Drey Skonie and the kLOUDS

ONGOING

Wed	7:30 9:30	Jauron Perry and Session

Common Grill

www.commongrill.com
112 South Main St.
CHELSEA (734) 475-0470

ONGOING

Tue	5:00	Rob Crozier Trio

Dirty Dog Jazz Café

www.dirtydogjazz.com
97 Kercheval
GROSSE PTE. FARMS 313-882-5299

ONGOING

Wed	6:30	Michael Zaporski

DECEMBER

4–6	6:30	The Gud Band
11–13	6:30	Gerard Gibbs
18–20	6:30	Charles & Gwen Scales
26, 27	6:30	Ron English
31	5:00	Damon Terrell

The Earle

www.theearle.com
121 West Washington St.
ANN ARBOR 734-994-0211

ONGOING

Tue	7:00	Jake Reichbart
Wed	7:00	Jake Reichbart
Thu	7:00	Jake Reichbart
Fri	7:00	Jazz Trio
Sat	7:00	Jazz Trio

Elks Lodge #325
110 West Ann Arbor Trail
PLYMOUTH

ONGOING

Sat	6:00	Open Jam Session – with Pete Siers, Kenji Lee, Andy Peck, Max Bowen

Imaginate Restaurant
imaginaterestaurant.com
401 South Lafayette Ave.
ROYAL OAK 248-633-8899

ONGOING

Wed	6:30	Eat It Up Trio

Kerrytown Concert House
kerrytownconcerthouse.com
415 North Fourth Ave.
ANN ARBOR 734-769-2999

DECEMBER

7	2:00	Olivia Van Goor Sings the Music of Ella Fitzgerald
12	7:30	Mr. B & The Kerrytown Stompers
14	2:00	Ellen Rowe's All About the Trio: Holiday Vibes
31	8:30	Pete Siers

London Chop House
155 West Congress St.
DETROIT

ONGOING

Thu	7:30	Paul Keller, Paul King, Ralph Tope, Adam Mosley

Lucille's Jazz Lounge
lucillesjazzlounge.com
1447 North Summit St., Suite C
TOLEDO, OH

DECEMBER

2, 3	6:00	Ray Arthur and Company
5	7:15	David Janeway Trio – featuring Ramona Collins
6	7:15	Keigo Hirakawa Trio
11	7:15	The Four of Us
13	7:15	Chris Canas
18	7:15	Sean Dobbins Soulful Holidays
19	7:15	Ramona Collins
20	7:15	Big B and the Actual Proof
26	7:15	Lucille's Anniversary Showcase
27	7:15	Jean Holden

Orchestra Hall
dso.org
3711 Woodward Ave.
DETROIT

DECEMBER

6	8:00	Cyrus Chestnut: A Charlie Brown Christmas

Schoolcraft College
schoolcraft.edu/music
Vistatech Center, 15600 Haggerty Rd.
LIVONIA 734-462-4403

DECEMBER

10	Noon	Paul Keller: Christmas Music for Jazz Lovers
15	7:30	Schoolcraft College Jazz Program: Winter Wonders

Shield's
25101 Telegraph Rd.
SOUTHFIELD

DECEMBER

6	1:00	John Hill and the Soggy Bottom Big Band – with Dave Bennett & Olivia Van Goor
20	1:00	Dave Tatrow Christmas Show
31	6:00	Jerry McKenzie's Just Jazz

Venue by 4M
experience4m.com
1919 South Industrial Hwy.
ANN ARBOR 734-800-0128

ONGOING

Sun	11 am	Jazz Sunday Brunch
Sat	7:00	Saturday Night Jazz

Weber's Habitat Lounge
www.thehabitatannarbor.com
3050 Jackson Rd.
ANN ARBOR 734-665-3636

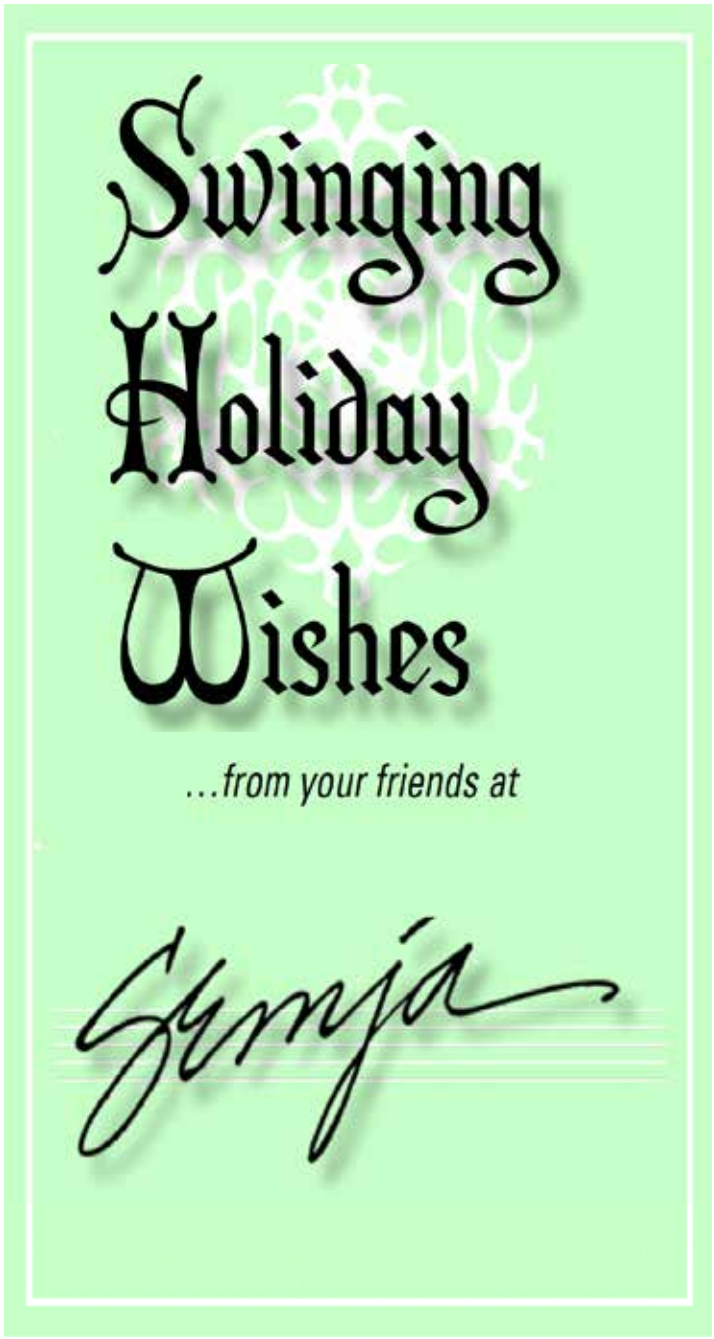
ONGOING

Mon	6:00	Keaton Royer, Josef Deas
Tue	6:00	Keaton Royer, Josef Deas
Wed	6:00	Keaton Royer, Josef Deas
Thu	6:00	Keaton Royer, Josef Deas
Sun	5:00	William Marshall Bennett

Zal Gaz Grotto
zalgaz.org
2070 West Stadium Blvd.
ANN ARBOR 734-663-1202

ONGOING

Sun	5:00	Phil Ogilvie's Rhythm Kings
Mon	7:00	Paul Keller Orchestra
Tue	5:30	Paul Klinger's Easy Street Jazz Band



Upcoming Jazz Events

JANUARY

2–4	Trunino Lowe Quintet – featuring Marion Hayden • Cliff Bells, Detroit
9	The Detroit Jazz Project • Cliff Bells, Detroit
9, 10	Don Was and the Pan-Detroit Ensemble • Blue LLama, Ann Arbor
10	Ramona Collins • Shield's, Southfield
10	Gwenyth Hayes • Cliff Bells, Detroit
11	Mason Bays • Cliff Bells, Detroit
24	Olivia Van Goor with The Eat It Up Trio • Shield's, Southfield
30	The Cookers • Aretha's Jazz Café at Music Hall, Detroit

FEBRUARY

6–8	Caleb Wheeler Curtis • Orchestra Hall, Detroit
28	James Dapogny's Chicago Jazz Band • Shield's, Southfield

3020 Bolgos Circle
Ann Arbor, MI 48105

Organization
US Postage
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Permit No. 240
Ann Arbor, MI

Membership

Renew

Connie Miller

The Southeastern Michigan Jazz Association

(SEMJA) was formed in 1987 for the purpose of promoting understanding and appreciation of jazz as an art form. The organization is comprised of professional musicians, jazz scholars, jazz writers, club owners, broadcasters and listeners. The organization operates through a Board and with a volunteer staff.

SEMJA is a 501(c) (3) non-profit organization.

Inquiries

All mail should be sent to SEMJA,
3020 Bolgos Circle,
Ann Arbor, MI 48105
For phone messages
call: 734.668.7470
email: *semja@semja.org*

Publication

The *SEMJA Update* is published monthly and sent to members at no cost. It is edited by Lars Bjorn and Piotr Michalowski with additional assistance from Barton Polot (production editor), Margot Campos (layout), and Jeff Gaynor.

SEMJA online

website: *www.semja.org*
social: *facebook.com/semja.org*

SEMJA Board Meeting

The SEMJA Board meets normally on the third Tuesday of the month at 6:30 p.m. The meeting on December 16 will be held online via video conferencing (Zoom). Please call Lars at 734-353-3568 if you have questions.

Board Members

Lars Bjorn, *President*
Piotr Michalowski, *Vice-president*
Jeff Gaynor, *Secretary, Treasurer*
Barton Polot, *Webmaster and Managing Editor*
Ron Brooks, *President Emeritus*

Ira Lax
Kenji Lee
Ingrid Racine
Ellen Rowe
Sandy Schopbach
Linda Yohn

SEMJA Membership Application

Mail to: SEMJA • 3020 Bolgos Circle.
Ann Arbor, MI 48105

❑ New Member
❑ Renewal

Membership Levels

❑ Basic	$30
❑ Student	$20
❑ Couple	$40
❑ Patron	$60
❑ Nonprofit Corp.	$50
❑ Corporate	$250
❑ Lifetime	$500

Amount Enclosed $_____

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❑ Check payable to **SEMJA** ❑ Credit Card |___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|___|

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